

MEMORIAL

OF

ALPHONSO WETMORE,

*For a reconsideration of his claim on account of losses in the service
of the United States.*

MAY 11, 1836.

Referred to the Committee of Claims, and ordered to be printed.

*To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives, in Congress
of the United States :*

The petition of the undersigned

RESPECTFULLY REPRESENTS :

That, in his application for relief, for money lost, which application has been before both Houses of Congress, great and irreparable injustice has been done to his character, by a misapprehension of facts, which the Committee of the House of Representatives were at first led into, and which the Committee of Claims of the Senate adopted, in addition to a few lines which they prefixed to the report aforesaid.

Your petitioner therefore renews, in the most respectful manner, his claim for relief from the evil consequences, not only of the perilous service in which he was engaged at the time he sustained the loss, but likewise from the greater evil and injustice which the proceedings in his case have accidentally imposed ; and he asks a reconsideration of his claim, with particular reference to the whole history of the loss, and of the errors which have grown out of a misunderstanding of the facts of the case, and the motives of the petitioner ; which are herein set forth, with the affidavit of your petitioner annexed.

Your petitioner was paymaster to the Missouri expedition, in the year 1819, and ascended that river as far as Cow island, with the troops, where the battalion which was in advance was mustered and paid. When this duty was finished, your petitioner received an order from the officer in command to repair to Bellefontaine, the military post near the mouth of Missouri ; and on the way down, to pay off several companies which were ascending the river in keel-boats, and on board the steam-boat Johnson. Your petitioner was provided with the best mode of conveyance that was at the disposal of the commanding officer, without impairing the means of transporting the troops forward to Council Bluffs, the place of their ultimate destination. The boat furnished was com-

posed of two canoes, upon which a platform of puncheons was placed. The crew for navigating this rude bark consisted of the paymaster's clerk, and *three soldiers who had been discharged for disability*. Mr. Alley was a citizen and a passenger. The day of the shipwreck, Mr. Alley was ill, having suffered in the morning by a violent paroxysm of ague. The clerks at that period allowed paymasters were necessarily taken from the line, in conformity to law. The clerk of your petitioner, although the best he could procure from amongst the non-commissioned officers of the troops he paid, was drunk as often as he could procure ardent spirits. The temperance rules that have improved the condition of the army were not then in force. Thus, then, was your petitioner put afloat on the mad waters of the Missouri, with a *drunken* clerk as *steersman*, and three *disabled discharged* soldiers, and a *sick* passenger. The whole arrangement, which was in pursuance of a special order of the officer in command and under his immediate inspection, seemed to invite disaster ! and to bring on this, the most natural result, it was only necessary to encounter the storm, which suddenly arose just as night was closing in upon your petitioner, and the boat was cast away, as described in the affidavit of Mr. Alley. The Committee of Claims have suggested a doubt whether any money was lost by sinking the boat, and attempt, by argument, to sustain this suggestion. After having read the affidavit hereunto annexed, it may be presumed that the petitioner will no more have his honor outraged by an attempt to impeach his veracity. If there should be a repetition of this affront in any quarter, he ventures here to suggest, with the most respectful regard to the dignity of the honorable bodies he addresses, but with the freedom of a citizen of this republic, that he will

“ Punish insult where it is given,
“ If 'twere in the court of Heaven.”

The committee inquire why it was that, if any money was lost, all did not share the same fate. This is answered in the fact that, in the side pocket of your petitioner, a package of notes was placed, and this was saved ; and with this money, in part, he afterwards paid the companies he met. To make up the deficiency occasioned by the loss, drafts were drawn on the sutler, which fact is corroborated by the statement of Captain Palmer. The money lost being much the largest sum, about twelve thousand dollars, and principally small notes, was of considerable bulk. This was in a package, and in the immediate custody of your petitioner, in the stern of the boat, where he sat when she sunk. In an effort to save his life, by swimming ashore with one hand only, your petitioner was obliged to relinquish his hold on the money. The *crippled* crew had enough to do to save their own lives, and the condition of the sick passenger was truly deplorable. The Committee of Claims remark that “ if he had lost money, it would have been entirely natural for the petitioner to have mentioned it to his comrades and men with him at the time.” The committee should have borne in mind, that the discipline of the army, and the good taste of an officer, would alike forbid him to find “ *comrades* ” amongst *private soldiers* !! In some of the communications of the petitioner, his reasons are assigned for silence at the time of the loss, and ever after, until he was driven to the necessity of a

disclosure, by his failure in every attempt to retrieve his affairs, and they were simply these: In every instance where a disbursing officer had lost money, he had witnessed the sneers and inuendoes cast upon the sufferers, which seemed to imply incredulity; and your petitioner therefore immediately came to a determination to conceal the loss he had sustained, and replace it out of his earnings. To this determination he rigidly adhered, until necessity forced him to abandon it.

Your petitioner would take occasion here to remark, that he never suggested that the people with him could be considered "interested witnesses." It was his own testimony that he felt reluctant in offering, for he was himself interested, and deeply!

Your petitioner would here call the attention of your honorable body, in a particular manner, to the *basis* of his claim. It is not founded on the *extraordinary* duties imposed, and cheerfully discharged for many years, nor in the suffering of grievous wounds, won in honor's great thoroughfare, the field of battle, *but upon the insufficient means furnished for transportation of his person and funds, at the time the loss was sustained.* The outfit furnished your petitioner, as has already been shown, being totally inadequate to the service required, a sense of justice should ensure success to the claim that your petitioner has taken the liberty again to reiterate.

Your petitioner would ask leave to refer to the letter of the chief of the department in which he served, an extract of which letter is annexed to the report of the Committee of Claims, and to transcribe a single sentence, which deserves particular notice. It is as follows: "The fact is, that no other officer of the department was ever so much indulged."

To enable your honorable body to understand the full value of the indulgence extended to your petitioner, a sketch of the service he has performed in a period of about *eighteen* years that he was a member of the pay department, is submitted.

From the organization of the peace establishment, in 1815, the year your petitioner was appointed paymaster, to the time his regiment marched from Plattsburg to Council Bluffs, it was his duty to pay ten companies of the 6th infantry, and to make other casual disbursements, and to perform much camp duty that was imposed by his commission in the line. On his arrival in Missouri, the "*indulgences*" which the Paymaster General boasts having extended, consisted in the most perilous journeys, through trackless prairies, in the Indian country, to almost all the Western posts, from Rock island, on the Mississippi, to Council Bluffs, on the Missouri; Forts Smith and Gibson, on the Arkansas, and finally, to the bank of the Red river. One of the particular pieces of "*indulgence*" extended to your petitioner for many years, was to pack specie through the Indian country to Council Bluffs, attended generally by an escort of *four* men, private soldiers—occasionally more—but as often only two men were allowed.

The almost trackless wilderness through which the route of your petitioner lay, was cut with an infinite number of streams that were rarely fordable; and his invention was constantly put to the test, in the construction of bark canoes, in the formation of rafts, and in the fabrication of skin boats, the last of which having been made portable, were prefer-

red ; and it was not an uncommon practice, when arriving on the bank of some prairie stream, to go out and slay an elk, and make a boat of his skin. An underwriter in such risks as your petitioner took, should have been allowed more than a major's pay, by way of premium. Considering the nature of these "*indulgences*" of the Paymaster General, to the petitioner, it is only matter of surprise that his executor or administrator is not now the claimant for relief of the murdered paymaster's representatives, for a much larger sum, swept off by the madness of the red-skins, instead of the impetuous current of the Missouri.

At a later period, when payments were made by your petitioner in United States paper, he was grudgingly supplied with two men, besides his clerk, to protect the large sums that he was required to disburse at frontier posts. While this "*indulgence*" was extended to your petitioner, other paymasters, in full possession of their just proportions, were indulging in the luxuries of the Atlantic coast, charged with the light duty of paying four companies, and your petitioner was sometimes disbursing, single-handed, to twenty. To cap the climax of the Paymaster General's boasted "*indulgence*," your petitioner, according to his clearest recollections, received from him four several orders in the space of two years, to change his station : to St. Louis, to Jefferson barracks, to St. Augustine, in Florida, and lastly, to Memphis, in Tennessee. It is true that special remonstrances against such expensive and oppressive orders secured impunity in two or three instances. But the last order was urged with that spirit of "*indulgence*" which had a direct tendency to consummate the ruin of your petitioner, who could perceive no end to the harassing "*indulgences*" that, in marches and counter-marches, were likely to consume all his earnings, which he had fondly hoped to apply to the extinguishment of the debt now claimed by the Treasury ; therefore he resigned. But unless the prayer of your petitioner is granted, this demand of the United States must be levied on the mutilated person of a soldier who had served his country with zeal and entire devotion, in peace and war, twenty-one years, and who left that service with effects equivalent to the allowance to an Indian warrior, when the funeral requiem is chaunted over him !

In the concluding paragraph of the Paymaster General's letter, as extracted for the use of the Committee of Claims, your petitioner observes, with peculiar regret, that this distinguished officer, while the sutler's receipt was on file in his office, written on the back of the note of your petitioner, acknowledging the full and entire payment of his demand against the petitioner, could give currency to the report that "the debt was not satisfactorily discharged." Your petitioner would take occasion here to aver, in the most solemn manner, that the report which the Paymaster General has given currency to, in the same paragraph, that this acknowledgment was extorted from the sutler, *is untrue*. This note your petitioner desires may be called for, and that the Paymaster General may be required to produce it as evidence to remove one of the undeserved reproaches that have been made to bear on him in revengeful recklessness.

Your petitioner would beg the further indulgence, in the concluding paragraph, of his appeal to the representatives of a generous and proud people, the magnanimous legislators of a rich, prosperous, and grateful republic, while he deplores the necessity, that would seem to exist, of

cutting off from an invalid officer, the pittance of THIRTEEN dollars per month, his only means of support, given by his country *as an equivalent for the loss of his right arm !!* and your petitioner, as in patriotic duty bound, will ever pray.

ALPHONSO WETMORE.

FRANKLIN, *April 2*, 1836.

HOWARD COUNTY, *Franklin township* :

Personally came and appeared, Alphonso Wetmore, before me, the undersigned, a justice of the peace for the county aforesaid, and made oath that the facts set forth in the foregoing instrument of writing are just and true. Given under my hand this 4th day of April, 1836.

JAMES ALLCORN, *J. P.*

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